

USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

**LATIN AMERICAN LEFTIST GOVERNMENTS AND THEIR EFFECTS ON U.S.
INTERESTS**

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ABSTRACT

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Within the last decade, Latin America has experienced a resurgence of leftist governments. This rise in socialism/liberalism will have effects for the U.S. government within the region. We have already seen a cooling of relations with several nations, most notably, Venezuela. This has potential effects for military cooperation, commerce, and common strategic interests. The perceived U.S. focus on the global war on terrorism and lack of Latin American policy has changed the way Latin America views the U.S. I intend to explore the change in the political landscape of the Latin American nations, the potential impacts for the U.S., and how our policy in Latin America is perceived.

LATIN AMERICAN LEFTIST GOVERNMENTS AND THEIR EFFECTS ON U.S. INTERESTS

Latin America on the Move

The Latin American political landscape is changing. Within the last few years, elections within the region have led to nine governments with left-leaning heads of state.¹ This change has great social, political, and economic implications not only for Latin America as a whole, but for the United States, as well. Pressing world events have caused the U.S. to turn their attention to wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the Global War on Terrorism, and the proliferation of WMD, and other world events, vice its southern neighbor. As we will see, during this lapse of U.S. diplomacy in the region, Latin America is reshaping its political climate and other countries are also sewing the seeds of diplomacy on the continent.

A look at the political landscape post recent elections in major Latin America countries reveals a shift to leftist governments:

- Argentina – Nestor Kirchner; elected in 2003
- Bolivia – Evo Morales; elected in 2005
- Brazil – Luiz Inacio Lula de Silva; elected in 2002
- Chile – Michelle Bachelet; elected in 2006
- Cuba – Fidel Castro; dictator since 1959
- Ecuador – Rafael Correa; elected in 2006
- Nicaragua – Daniel Ortega; elected in 2006
- Uruguay – Tabae Vazquez; elected in 2004
- Venezuela – Hugo Chavez; reelected 2006

Why the change to leftist governments? The most plausible reasons include: 1) a general discontent by the populous that everyday people were not seeing a positive change in their lives under previous governments; 2) during the past decade, the U.S. has largely ignored Latin America in favor of other regions of the world; 3) socialists/leftists candidates campaigned for the people, not for big business and greater government control; 4) the leftists have used (supposed) U.S. imperialism as a reason for change.

As we see that nine of the Latin American nations, mainly the largest, are now aligned to the political left, two other countries, Peru and Mexico recently defeated, by a very narrow margin, leftist candidates in their presidential elections.² This change reflects a major political shift that has serious implications for U.S. influence in the region.

United States – Latin American Relations

It is important for us to understand the historical perspective of relations between the United States and Latin America and the distinct differences in the policies that we formulated in working with our Latin American neighbors. Of note, is the decided differences that each era contained and how it has influenced U.S. perception within Latin American countries. We will expound on germane points of these distinctive eras and the importance of them in the rise of left-centered democracy in Latin America today.

The history of the relationship between the United States and Latin America can be divided into five relatively distinct periods: 1820-80, the era of the Monroe Doctrine and U.S. paternalism; 1880-1934, the era of open U.S. imperialism, intervention, and the policies of gunboat diplomacy and the “big stick;” 1934-45, the “good Neighbor Policy;” 1945-90, the Cold War, the Alliance for Progress, the Cuban and Nicaraguan revolutions and U.S. support for anti-communist dictators; and 1990-present, the post cold War era, the emergence of democracy in Latin America, and a growing U.S.- Latin American trade partnership.³

The Monroe Doctrine, which was actually a speech presented by President Monroe to Congress in 1823, set the course for U.S. intervention in Latin America when it deemed that there was a threat by European nations of exporting their systems to the Western Hemisphere. However good this warning may have seemingly been at the time, the U.S. did not intervene when Great Britain seized control of the Falkland Islands from Argentina in 1833 or when France waged military actions against Mexico and Argentina from 1838-40. Additionally, the United States, in expanding its territory westward, fought Mexico in 1848 and gained sizable territory in the process. That era no doubt, left an indelible perception within much of Latin America, that while the Monroe Doctrine was sound in speech, in practice it went counter to its intentions.

The rise of U.S. imperialism took place in the following era of U.S.-Latin American relations, when the U.S. began to show rising economic interest in the region. In 1889, the United States hosted the first Pan-American Conference and established the basis for an inter-American regional system under U.S. domination.⁴ This domination realized itself in the form of military incursions and President Theodore Roosevelt’s motto, “speak softly and carry a big stick.” The U.S. fought Spain in 1898 and after winning, occupied Cuba, the Philippines, and Puerto Rico. The U.S. also helped Panama to gain independence from Colombia in 1903 by the threat of U.S. military action. During the presidency of Woodrow Wilson, the U.S. seized the port of Veracruz, Mexico, when U.S. intelligence determined that a shipment of German arms was bound for that country.⁵

Wilson also sent troops into Mexico to capture the infamous Pancho Villa, as well as sent Marines at one time or another to occupy Nicaragua, Honduras, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic and Haiti.⁶ All of this occurred before our intervention into World War I. The occupation of Nicaragua was particularly damaging to U.S. interests; the fight against the rebel leader Augusto César Sandino, made him a martyr and hero to the common man in Latin America, and paved the way for a Marxist movement for the next 50 years.⁷ Instead of fostering democratic principles through diplomacy, the U.S. facilitated a socialist movement throughout the region via an interventionist policy.

During this rise in U.S. imperialism, it is easy to see why Latin America viewed America as an aggressor, not so much to protect Latin America, but to foster U.S. interests in the region. Latin America had little cohesion, either collectively or individually, to counter U.S. hegemony in the region. While the populous resented the U.S. intervention in the region, they also felt resentment against their own governments, due to the internal policies of their elite rulers. A clear policy of spreading democracy throughout the region was not clearly defined by the United States, nor was it a goal of the Latin American region.

In 1934, the U.S., under President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, adopted the “Good Neighbor” policy, a fairly radical shift from the previous policy of “speak softly but carry a big stick,” where the stick was used much more often than the soft-spoken speech (diplomacy). Under the Good Neighbor policy, the U.S. embarked on a more conciliatory stance, assisting Latin America economically and not embarking on overt military actions into the region. The economic recovery and better trade agreements, the rise of fascism, adoption by the (Latin American) Communist parties of a conciliatory tactic known as the “popular front” and the spirit of solidarity provoked by World War II contributed to raise the Good Neighbor Policy and Pan Americanism to a real level of continental unity.⁸ However, upon the death of President Roosevelt and the end of World War II, the United States once again, focused efforts on Europe and the Soviet threat and relegated Latin America to the “back burner” of American politics. The lack of a coherent, consistent and time tested policy for our neighbors had cost us the opportunity to affect our influence on the region and foster good will among our southern neighbors.

During the Cold War era, we see a dual policy by the United States in Latin America. On the one hand, the U.S. policy in Central America was designed to destroy the socialist movements of the region, and the second track, used in South America, which involved support for elections where liberal policies gained hegemony over the mass movements and were willing to accept socio-economic policies acceptable to the banks and the armed forces.⁹ In

1976, President Jimmy Carter invoked the human-rights-based foreign policy when dealing with countries in the Southern Cone. This policy as defined by the U.S. Congress, assumed the power to limit U.S. economic and military aid to “any country which engages in a consistent pattern of gross violations of internationally recognized human rights.”¹⁰ Subsequently, military and economic aid was reduced in the southern cone countries, which had a considerable effect, even if mainly at the psychological level, on the repressive regimes and their opponents.¹¹ While not a positive leaning policy, in this instance, the cause of human rights greatly outweighed the oppressive actions of the military dictated rule in those countries.

The Cuban nuclear missile threat made Fidel Castro a victor, while the Soviet Union and the United States had to compromise; the Soviets withdrew their missiles from the island, but President Kennedy had to promise the Soviets that he would never invade Cuba. This went counter to the Monroe Doctrine and that is when Castro took the opportunity to spread his form of revolution and communism throughout as much of Latin America as possible. After all, he did not have to worry about another U.S. planned invasion. From 1962 to 1968, Havana became a center of support for leftist revolutionaries who spread their activities from Mexico to Argentina. Nevertheless, the formula failed. Opposed by communist parties that rejected any revolution they did not control as the “vanguard of the proletariat,” and confronted by armies much better trained than (former Cuban president) Batista’s, the guerrillas were defeated everywhere.¹² The lesson for the U.S. here is that democracy has to be accepted in the Latin American countries as their own form of government. Just as Cuba’s export of the revolution failed, so will democracy if the Latin American people do not see it as part of their national political landscape.

What can we then infer of U.S. foreign policy over this period? Have we embraced Latin America as a friend with a policy that seeks to build ties and strengthen the bonds between our governments so that we can build a greater union with respect to economic ties and trade relations, military exercises, goals for expanding cooperation on the environment and natural resources, immigration, drug policies, education, medical exchanges, and political assistance? Has our policy been succinct and clear in its goals for mutual cooperation and one that is welcomed by our southern neighbors? The brief review above clearly depicts a policy that is not coherent in its depth nor one that follows a straight path; it has waxed and waned with almost each U.S. presidential administration, alternately focusing on what Latin America could do for the U.S. or waning when other world events and our preoccupations with other matters around the globe overtake our attention. This lack of a solid, straight forward policy has damaged our ability to help shape the political landscape of Latin America and has hurt our influence in the

region and our promotion of democracy. In turn, we have lost economic opportunities, damaged military ties, and most importantly, lost political capital in the region over the years.

Influencing Forces in Latin America

Above and beyond the large cold war influence by the Soviet Union in Cuba, the United States has enjoyed the primary role of influencing power in most Latin American countries during much of the twentieth century. The United States established a military presence in Panama, American companies began commercial operations throughout Latin America, and we exported everything from Coca-Cola to baseball throughout the region. This influence is economic, military, political, and cultural. However, U.S. political and military influence has waned over the past ten years, beginning with the withdrawal of troops and closing of military bases in Panama in 1997 and with U.S. political direction shifting to the Global War on Terrorism and the issues of the Middle East. This shift has had profound impacts for the U.S., as we have seen the politics of Latin America shift decidedly to the left and away from American policies.

Why is influence so important in Latin America? The region experienced influence from its early days of European exploration and colonization. The Spanish influence is indisputable. Spain, Portugal, France, and the United States have all left their political and cultural marks on the landscape of Latin America. The Spanish, in spite of their often despotic military actions, left their mark through the introduction of Spanish law, the Catholic Church, as well as culture and customs. The Soviet Union also played an important role in Cuba, in helping Castro economically and politically, until the collapse of the Soviet State. However, this influence helped to solidify Cuba who has continued communist rule even after Soviet assistance ended.

Understanding Latin American Politics Today

Latin America today is much different from the Latin America of the early 1900s. The perception was a mix of tropical republics run by strongmen, “Caudillos” fashioned from the Spanish colonial times. As recently as 1977, only three of the 20 true “Latin American republics” had genuinely democratic systems with free elections involving two or more political parties and peaceful transfers of power from one to another: Colombia, Costa Rica and Venezuela.¹³

Democracy in Latin America, it seemed, was a concept that was unfeasible at best and unwanted at worst. But in 1978, the tide slowly began to turn, until by the late 1980s it had become a tidal wave in favor of duly elected civilian government.¹⁴ As we can see from the chart above, of current Latin American (major) countries heads of state, all with the exception of Cuba’s Fidel Castro, were elected in a democratic process. This change of political events

seems to have risen from the tide of the people who are voicing their will of freely elected leaders, vice having government imposed on them by the Caudillos and military men of the past. This shift in political process and control is a win for democracy, but the results are begrudgingly accepted by the United States, as the outcomes depict a decidedly pro-left focus in these larger nations.

All supporters of democracy should applaud the change to freely elected leaders, but the trend may not continue. Latin America has a long history of political change. Bolivia, the most extreme example, over a 25 year period from 1964-1989, had 19 presidents, 13 of whom were generals, with only two completing a full term in office.¹⁵ While the U.S. can take solace in the fact that our neighbors to the south have largely embraced democratic principles now, it is up to us to continue to foster that political environment. It often takes generations before adherence to liberal principles becomes woven into a nation's social fabric.¹⁶

The Danger of Unified Parties

Unified parties may quickly lead to a one party governmental system. After his stunning victory of December 3 (2006), Venezuela's President Hugo Chavez urged his supporters to create an unified "Socialist Party" as a way to block internal discrepancies among more than 20 political organizations that back the "Bolivarian Revolution."¹⁷ At the very least, this creates a unified coalition that solidifies political power within one party. At the worst, the opposition is completely marginalized so that it becomes virtually ineffective as an alternate voice for the people; an alternative government becomes a non-reality. Internally then, there is a virtual one party system that can evolve into a dictatorship, wielding its power at will.

Opposition voice, at almost any level is jeopardized. In the case of Venezuela, one of the leading television stations had its license revoked for alleged complicity in the 2002 attempted coup against President Chavez. Radio Caracas Television (RCTV), Venezuela's oldest commercial TV station, is set to go off the air in May 2007. "There will be no license renewal for this putschist TV station called Radio Caracas Television," Chavez announced on 28 December 2006. "Here, we will not tolerate any news media that is in the service of those who make coups against the people, against the nation, against national independence and against the dignity of the republic. Venezuela must be respected."¹⁸ The repercussions of another Cuban style government in Latin America could be formidable for the United States. The time and effort we spend on Cuban issues cannot be replicated again; diplomacy must be used to foster more favorable relations with Venezuela, while hopefully steering them away from total socialism.

Another very notable example existed in Mexico, where from 1917 to 2000, one party, the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) governed at all levels of politics in the country, using a vise-grip approach and was not above rigging elections to quash the aspirations of upstart opposition parties.¹⁹

What is to stop a government then, from controlling all media sources so that only favorable information (to the controlling government) is released? Virtually nothing, if only one party controls the government. As in the case of Cuba, state control is absolute in nearly every aspect of the media, economy, and society as a whole. Little information is made public that is not vetted through the state. Venezuela is well on its way to having the same form of public media control. The state then becomes the only sponsor of media communications, controlling the information that is released. This results in distorted reporting and propaganda, which in the eyes of the world, discredits the government and its ability to work openly with other nations. What is worse, countries that universally control the media tend to believe their own rhetoric, thus fanning the flame of their own inhospitable cause.

Latin America, with its history of rapid changes of government, strongman, and military rule, needs to be ever more aware of the changes in government that can take place via democratically elected leaders. President Chavez, democratically elected and then reelected last year, is already pushing for a change to the constitutional amendment that restricts presidents to two terms. In fact, his aim is to abolish term limits so that he can gain the presidential office for life. Free, democratic elections then, can become the avenue from which a dictator is born.

This is not the only path that is available however. Other Latin American countries have displayed a more democratic change of late. Mexico, since 2000, has democratically elected two presidents that have not adhered to the traditional politics of the nation since the early twentieth century. Much is the same with Brazil, who in 1979 installed the military President (General) Joao Baptista de Oliveira Figueiredo to a six year term, pledged to “open this country up to democracy.”²⁰ In 1980, free elections were held for all offices except president, and in 1985, a democratically elected president was voted into office, ending 21 years of military rule. We have the reverse here; from a military dictatorship, democracy was born. The lesson for the United States is to not overreact either way; change in Latin America is a reality. When democracy is born, we must take the full range of diplomatic, economic, military training, and humanitarian assistance tools to foster the fledgling democracies.

Economics and Latin America

Much can be studied and written of the economics of Latin America from the early 1800s colonial period to the modern republics of today, but the most succinct synopsis is that while we previously thought of the region as a collection of “banana republics” and lagging South American economies, today Latin America is at the forefront of emerging world markets.

The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) gave rise to the possibility of creating free trade zones whereby countries can trade tariff free and use their local economic advantages to create a better fiscal environment for their government, national and local businesses. Mexico used their labor advantage, the United States their technological and manufacturing capabilities, and Canada their vast natural resources. The free flow of goods, services and capital offered great opportunities for the countries involved. While there were many political hurdles to overcome in reaching the agreement, the success, while disputed by some, has been notable. However, NAFTA did not address the full scope of hemispheric free trade; another agreement was necessary to achieve that aim.

The effort to unite the economies of the Americas into a single free trade area began at the Summit of the Americas, which was held in December 1994 in Miami. The Heads of State and Government of the 34 democracies in the region agreed to construct a Free Trade Area of the Americas or FTAA, in which barriers to trade and investment will be progressively eliminated.²¹ The trade question and the move toward an FTAA are far from settled. The United States continues to display considerable ambivalence on free trade matters. Moreover, many Latin American governments have been dismayed by the rather surprising protectionist tendencies and farm subsidies in the United States. Such moves have effectively undercut the arguments being advanced by many advocates for greater reform and trade liberalization in Latin America.²² Since 1973, there have been a total of 24 trade agreements reached in the Americas, from large agreements such as NAFTA to smaller agreements between two countries. A recent agreement between the United States and Central America almost did not come to fruition. The Central American Free Trade Agreement, just barely got through a then-Republican Congress in 2005. The Democratic takeover of Congress has left the prospect for further free-trade agreements dubious.²³ While individual trade agreements certainly address the needs of a few nations, a comprehensive pact is required to fulfill the need for free investment and trade for the entire region. Without it, economic growth within and between the Western Hemisphere cannot fully realize the economic potential of the region, especially for the Latin American nations. The possibility of creating this economic “union” will ensure that Latin America can effectively compete and grow in the world market place.

Growth in Latin American Markets, Labor and Education

Latin American countries have long used labor legislation as a tool of social policy. Minimum wages and measures to protect jobs, such as heavy required severance packages or laws against hiring replacement workers, were seen as political vehicles for income transfers and the protection of the poor. The unintended result, however, was labor market rigidity. Labor market distortions in Latin America include government intervention in setting wages, high costs of dismissal, high payroll taxes, and the nature of labor-management relations.²⁴ This rigidity comes at a high cost. While it protects the individual workers, the stagnation for the corporations and the resulting lack of competition in the job market, keeps the unemployment rate and poverty rates high. Forty-four percent of Latin America and the Caribbean are mired in the hopelessness and squalor of poverty. The free market reforms and privatization of the 1990s have not delivered on the promise of prosperity for Latin America.²⁵

There are some bright spots to consider. Agriculture, in terms of crop productivity, has greatly increased in all nations except El Salvador and Panama. Along the same note, the labor force employed in agriculture has decreased by double digit rates in all countries. Overall, the movement to less labor-intensive means of production has indeed produced gains in output.²⁶ While this is good news in terms of productivity and a shift away from an agrarian based workforce, there is a need to increase the educational quality of the workforce in order to gain a competitive advantage in more technologically oriented production.

Most Latin American nations have been pushed out of the low wage bracket but have not gained broad entrance to the skill sets to compete successfully in the global arena. Rather than low wages, the key to competitiveness is investment in human capital, leading to higher labor productivity.²⁷ The investment that is needed is education: primary, university, and technical. Close to 80 percent of low-income students in Latin America cannot understand written messages after six years of schooling. Rural migrant workers' children are rarely incorporated into educational systems. There is a radical separation between the region's educational systems and its growing development needs in competitive open democracies.²⁸ The importance of education cannot be underestimated. Latin America and other developing regions of the world are at a competitive disadvantage without the ability to hire skilled technological and business people. Merely having an upper class and relatively small middle class with the skills to develop businesses and technology will be the hallmark of economic mediocrity. Mexico, for one, has made inroads into increasing the scope and breadth of education and in developing a skilled class of technological savvy labor. With their emerging technology sector and manufacturing, they are moving beyond a natural resource based

economy. Education is the vital tool to increase the capacity for Latin American nations to compete in the technology sector. Education is also vital for growing democracies; the ability to train and employ an advanced workforce can be the leverage needed for developing democracy.

What does Latin America Want?

It is always a good idea to address the wants and needs of a region or country from their perspective, before us, as “Norte Americanos” begin to tell Latin America, or any region for that matter, what is needed or required for them. This is a lesson for any modern government. While providing goods, services, and favorable trade to nation-states, if it is not wanted or warranted in their eyes, the giving nation reaps little political gain, and at the worst, resentment for not meeting the desires of the recipient nation.

Democracy is high on the list of Latin American wants, especially so among the populous. Past strong arm governments largely displayed militaristic control, constrained economic policies, and left in place the huge disparity between the rich and poor. For the most part, those in power and those in the military (sometimes one and the same), as well as the rich oligarchs, retained the political and economic power. As we can see by the recent elections throughout Latin America, the people have chosen a more democratic, if not social, reform to their governments in order to reap the rewards of freedom and independence. It can be argued that the nascent rise of widespread democracy in Latin America is not so much due to the choice of democratic rule, but possibly a change of rule from dictatorships that have oppressed the people and given them little in economic and political freedoms. Democracy in Latin America is being given a broad chance to prove itself viable to providing those freedoms to the general population and producing a better quality of life.

Respect is desired in Latin America; the vision of universal respect for the governmental rights of the Latin American nations by the United States. Our history reflects varying policy, inconsistent investment, “partiality” to certain countries, lack of free trade, militaristic adventures, and at times, an almost overt avoidance of the region in favor of other world events and priorities. The neglect of building a closer relationship, tied to a consistent policy that addresses the needs of the Latin American nations along with the goals of the U.S. government, should be our objective. Respect will garner much more favor than incomplete economic and military aid policies.

How “Left” is Latin America?

The elections over the last few years in Latin America leave little doubt that democracy is indeed rising and that a left of center form of that democracy is alive and well. Eight Latin American countries recently elected leftist democratic heads of state. Another country, Cuba, is communist, and Peru and Mexico recently, by narrow margins, defeated leftist candidates. Latin America’s current leftward drift is a response to the regional policy of the U.S. and multinational corporations, which have never taken into account local interests. The Latin American “red revolutionary battalion” is marching towards its goal on the left side of the road, but this is its own choice. No attempt has been made so far to move off the capitalist track, and I don’t think this will happen unless the U.S. makes the serious mistake of trying to interfere with this left-wing / capitalist march.²⁹

No one in Latin America is beating the Marxist drum. Admittedly, the most left Latin American head of state, President Hugo Chavez, has nationalized utility companies and called for abolishment of presidential terms, but there is little chance that he will change to true communism. There simply is not a sponsor in the world to back him up, coupled with the reality that some form of capitalism will be required to further grow his brand of politics. However left leaning and bellicose he is, the U.S. must not fan the flames of his cause. During the recent visit to Latin America by President Bush, his eighth since assuming office, he did not once directly address President Chavez by name or reply to Chavez’s attacking comments. President Bush’s replies addressed the aid that we have given to the region over the course of many years. This is the exactly the right approach; there is no reason to give anyone the opportunity to pursue the same direction as Venezuela’s political course vis-à-vis the United States.

We must remember that the other Latin American nations that have recently elected leftist governments did so under a democratic process. While each has differing forms of left leaning government, only Venezuela and Bolivia choose to pursue a socialist agenda. The remaining states have elected more liberal governments, but we could argue that as recently as our own November 2006 congressional elections, we too, have chosen a more liberal approach. The primary ability to work with each of these governments and foster their democratic principles, while addressing their other pressing needs, is the roadmap to success. In either ignoring the region or undertaking prohibitively harsh policies towards the most left of the regimes, do we offer the possibility of having Latin America turn away to more socialist forms of government. We can indeed take a lesson from Fidel Castro and his revolution. When the United States failed to recognize his government or deal with him directly, did he turn to the former Soviet

Union as a state sponsor. The implication for us is to engage early and often our neighbor countries to the south.

U.S. Implications of the Leftist Latin America and Charting Our Road Ahead

The recent leftist won elections has several implications for the United States. First and foremost is that the U.S. came to the realization that it has largely ignored the Latin American region, most notably post September 11, 2001. Concern about leftist victories in Latin America has prompted President Bush to quietly grant a waiver that allows the United States to resume training militaries from 11 Latin American and Caribbean countries.³⁰ This is definitely a step in the right direction, but the original law, adopted in 2002 to pressure countries around the world to exempt U.S. soldiers from prosecution in their courts, was ill-advised. The arms embargo portion of the law continues for the 21 countries outlined in the legislation. While the law was aimed at protecting soldiers, no one saw the ultimate consequences of the action when the law was drafted. Essentially, we excluded ourselves from one of the most important aspects of interaction, namely military training. With the rich military history of Latin America and many of the countries previous military ties to the U.S., we can ill afford to leave a training void to be occupied by another nation, most likely China, who is investing heavily in the region. The implications of losing this valuable shaping tool would be enormous. To give rise to the enormous impact such a measure would have, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice stated last year on a trip to the region, that the impact of the ban had been “the same as shooting ourselves in the foot.”³¹

We must address Latin America in the framework of democracy but without imposing consequences for those nations that do not choose our form of government. Our past support of the contra rebels wasted needless resources, prolonged a conflict that had little lasting implication for neighboring countries, and in the end, the man that we fought against, Daniel Ortega, is now the president of Nicaragua. Our lack of support for Castro has caused needless tension over the years and has actually fostered his ideas and government, as he has created within Cuba, the specter of the United States versus the Cuban people. We must not make that mistake again by giving our potential adversaries the ammunition that they need to stay in power. We have the opportunity to not make this mistake again with President Hugo Chavez, so that he cannot use the United States as the distraction needed to build his socialist state and then travel the world to trump his cause for socialism and anti-Americanism. While the general world media covers his bombastic overtures, one would be hard pressed to find a post 2002 major speech by Chavez that does not vilify the United States and/or President Bush.

Militarily, we need to expand on not only the training of Latin American militaries, but expand our exercises and humanitarian assistance in the region. In 2004, SOUTHCOM conducted 16 joint exercises involving 5,675 U.S. and 10,320 Partner nation troops; they also completed 30 engineer projects consisting of construction schools, medical clinics, community centers, sanitary facilities, wells, and road construction and repair.³² Additionally, SOUTHCOM deployed numerous medical and veterinary teams to the region, treating hundreds of thousands of persons and livestock. These programs need to expand, especially the engineer projects, which have a lasting, long term positive effect on the local people and economy. Thirty projects a year in a region as large as Latin America, equates to just over one project per nation per year, which is woefully inadequate. Additionally, we must ensure that we have an effective information operations plan associated with these endeavors; assuring that the Latin American press covers and reports the projects is vital to spreading U.S. goodwill. We must also have a close anti-terrorist / anti-organized crime training and intelligence sharing network in place with each country, to the extent that they are willing to participate. We need to engage each nation in the war on terror and make it a regional issue, not just one of the United States. Many of the Latin American nations have terrorist cells and organized crime that directly affects U.S. security. Currently, we concentrate most of our efforts on Colombia, because of the drug trade, and El Salvador, due to the presence of the violent Mara Salvatrucha, or MS-13 organized crime gang, which also has many cells in U.S. cities. While these are definitely important areas of concern, gangs and terrorists migrate and we must ensure that we have the intelligence and military training agreements already in place and producing results before major incidents arise. As Americans know all too well, the implications of not addressing these important issues is to the detriment of our safety and freedom.

The United States would do well in promoting education programs throughout Latin America. We spend billions of dollars on the region, but little directly affects the population. Education is the single most important tool to positively change and individual's social and economic stature. More highly trained and skilled workers means a more viable workforce that is able to produce goods and services for their nation, expanding trade and opening additional markets for U.S. goods. While U.S. corporations are present in Latin America, their focus is mainly on natural resource production. If nations, through education, could expand their business and technological horizons, U.S. businesses and investment would be attracted in greater numbers. The money that we would spend in the short term in helping to educate the people of Latin America, the more we would save in the long run. Funding for this endeavor can

be derived from the economic and other aid packages that we currently provide, which return far less than assisting in the education of the Latin American public.

The United States must succinctly state Latin American policy so that it addresses U.S. interests, without regard to party politics or short term economic or political advantages. The goal must be to increase the economic and political viability of the region, while truly embracing the region as a partner in world and regional events. The goal should be to raise the political, economic, educational, and social standards of the region for mutual benefit, while refraining from punitive measures designed to force an outcome. This type of diplomacy is almost always universally counterproductive; while we may ultimately arrive at our goal, the resulting popular backlash in the region causes us to lose valuable political capital. We need not abandon our principles of justice and freedom, but we need to make the framework of our policy one that invites participation and moves Latin American nations to reap the mutual rewards offered by choosing U.S. policy goals. The vision of a truly regional free trade agreement would be a start. Building a framework of investment, labor, manufacturing, transport, and trade that allows each nation to reach advantage in a free market style, will foster economic growth by allowing the market to control interactions. We can then assist nations lacking in various areas, by means of education, training, or loans so that they may better compete in the economic areas of their choosing.

Lastly, we must engage Latin American leaders as equals. Our past policies, from the Monroe Doctrine to President Theodore Roosevelt's "speak softly and carry a big stick," approaches Latin America as if we are the parent and they are the child. Aside from being the world's only super-power, we garner little favor when we act as if we can intervene at will. In the Kissinger Report, it shows clearly that the U.S. intervenes in Latin America either indirectly, as with an economic blockade or aid to the 'contras' or, if necessary and the opportunity arises, directly as it did in Grenada.³³ Not that there are instances when we should not use these overt acts, but we must increasingly use the full arsenal of our diplomatic efforts if we are to achieve true partnership in our relationship with Latin America. Our future and theirs depends on it.

Endnotes

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